

Meeting Minutes

RED ROCK DESERT LEARNING CENTER CORE GROUP

Bureau of Land Management

Tuesday, September 20, 2005

The meeting commenced at 10:35 a.m. with the following persons in attendance:

Loretta Asay, Kathy August, Blaine Benedict, Bob Clements, Nancy Flagg, Pat Fleming, David Frommer, Laurie Howard, Michael Johnson, Richard Leifreid, Alan O'Neill, Peg Rees, Michael Reiland, Henry Tom, Debbie Wright, and Billie Young.

1. Introductions and Announcements

The group welcomed Christine Bendel, Richard Cutbert from the Master Gardeners, and local resident Steve Ripka.

2. Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the August 16, 2005, meeting were approved with no changes.

3. Discussion of Scope/Design Issues

Michael Reiland asked Building Committee member David Frommer to provide an overview of issues that were discussed in the most recent committee meeting, where design development plans were reviewed. David noted a series of items of importance to Core Group members, some of which require input and others of which are more informational in nature.

Bus Staging Area – The bus drop-off has been moved further away from the Friendship Circle to save some road length and reduce land disturbance. It now combines the entry road with the parking area. Three drop-off points have been retained, but they are more modest in scale. There is now a longer distance to get to the bathrooms at the dining hall (although it remains less than 1/10th of a mile) but the committee noted that students could use restrooms in the administration building if needed, and a trail is being added between the bus drop-off and the administration building. All told, the changes were viewed by the Building Committee as a better design with less cost. The core group had no comments or questions about the bus drop-off.

Route 159 Interchange – Line and Space is coordinating plans with the Nevada Department of Transportation (NDOT). The plans call for a hardened intersection above grade with box culverts or drainage below, constructed to NDOT design criteria. David noted this surface is not expected to require significant repair in storm events. The plan is to use hardened road up to the parking area, then switch to a stabilized surface. The core group had no comments or questions about the interchange.

Solar Bridge Utilities – The question is whether the utilities should run on the underside of the bridge or be buried underneath the existing channel directly below. It is an issue of cost versus disturbance, and the Building Committee was divided on the issue. David noted that running utilities under the bridge will cause less disturbance, but maintenance of the exposed lines may or may not have cost and serviceability issues. Pat Fleming said the biggest problem is with hanging sewer lines under the bridge. Peg Rees asked how deep the trench would have to be to withstand a 100 year flood. Michael Reiland noted the channel moves over time, and Bob Clements said some utilities require encasement in concrete. David Frommer asked about erosion over time. Bob said it would be an issue that a civil engineer would need to assess. Pat Fleming added that a hydrologist tried to predict the impact, and his assessment indicated that the channel

tends to bend just before the flex labs. The depth of the gully won't change but its direction will over time. Estimates are that it would be 50-100 years before channel changes threaten the pilings for the flex labs.

Peg Rees pointed out that the utilities issue is predicated on the labs staying in the wash, now potentially cutting into the wash, with the addition of a road through a riparian area on the property. She said the siting of the labs results in a utility issue, a road issue, and a bridge issue. The alternative is to look at a different site for the flex labs, as she has advocated in the past. Steve Ripka asked about the rationale of running utilities to the labs instead of making them independent. He suggested there are opportunities to do it differently and avoid costs. Michael Reiland said other options have been investigated. Wireless is not possible because it is a government facility. Composting toilets were looked at, but there is not enough waste generated at the flex labs to justify a learning opportunity for students.

Instructor Housing – David noted concerns with being able to build instructor housing because of budget. The Building Committee favored building some housing of a more modest design. They discussed reducing the units from apartment-style to suite-style, with private bedrooms and bathrooms but consolidated dining and kitchen in a common area, which reduces approximately 40% square footage. Michael added that the agency is now looking at constructing half the proposed instructor housing with the remainder as an additive alternate. He noted BLM plans to talk to the State of Nevada about the possibility of using a structure at Spring Mountain State Park that was once used for housing; an option might be for BLM to fund some restoration and use that structure for instructor housing. The downside is that the instructors would not be on-site, although they would be nearby, and the responsibility for maintenance of the housing would need to be settled. In general, the core group agreed that some instructor housing should be constructed on site, but the more modest design was deemed appropriate.

Flex Labs – The total number of labs is under discussion. Currently, the plans call for one research lab plus 4 flex labs, but the curriculum appears to warrant only 3 teaching labs. Bob Clements said the architects looked at the total number of available teaching venues during programming. The size of the labs do not support an entire classroom, but rather smaller groups of 10-12. Having indoor facilities for inclement weather was also an issue. Alan O'Neill didn't see any problem reducing the flex labs to three. Nancy Flagg said she was concerned about deciding that issue without Paul Buck and Jeanne Klockow in attendance to make sure the curriculum supports a reduction in labs. Bob pointed out that he has an upcoming meeting with Jeanne and Paul and would discuss this issue with them.

Art Pavilion – There is some discussion about combining the art pavilion and the observatory into one facility, especially since area is designed primarily for day use while the other is for night use. The flex labs could also be used for art activities. Kathy August pointed to the need to consider people movement for night-time activities for three groups. Michael Reiland agreed and said another option is to retain the pavilion but reduce its scope.

Central Plant – The Building Committee has determined the central plan should be sized appropriately for the facilities at build-out as currently programmed, but it should not be sized for future improvements and additions. The committee discussed taking out the viewing platform because it is not a core element of the curriculum. A viewing window could remain and tours could be arranged by individual instructors. The core group had no comments or questions about the plans.

Wild Hors & /Burro Facility – The Building Committee is discussing whether two restrooms – one for the public and one for staff/public – is sufficient. Peg Rees asked if the total scope of the wild horse and burro facility has been considered for any reductions. Michael Reiland said some cuts have been made, especially to the size of the arena roof and the number of restrooms. Billie Young noted there are some limits to the design even now. Loretta Asay asked about placing the photovoltaics on the walkway instead of on the roof. She also noted the need for emergency exits off the elevated walkway, which could add costs. Some concerns have been expressed about ongoing maintenance of the photovoltaics given the dust generated by the horses.

Loretta asked about usage of the administration building. Michael said a staff person will be there 7 days a week. They hope to grow to 12 adoptions per year, host rodeos, and eventually have the operator allow daily adoptions, in addition to having students visit every day from the learning center. Billie also pointed to the need to support the visitor center operations. Loretta questioned Michael's assertion that every child at the RRDLC will visit the wild horse facility. Her understanding was that teachers were being given an option. She has concerns about this that she would like to discuss with BLM.

Dormitories – David said the current plan is to include all 3 dormitories in the base bid, with instructor housing as an alternate. Another option is to build half now and half later. Is it a better strategy to build two-thirds of the dorms and some instructor housing versus all 3 dorms and no instructor housing? Kathy August clarified that chaperones and one on-site administrator would still be housed on-site in the dormitories even if no instructor housing were built. The answer was yes. Richard Cutbert asked if any of the housing could be built given inflationary increases. He asked if there was an option for day-trips only. Michael Reiland said the SNPLMA nomination calls for a residential program and pointed out that cutting the dorms by a third reduces the total number of students that can be served. Blaine Benedict said tradeoffs are hard to decide when it isn't known how much one dorm costs versus one instructor housing unit. He asked if there wasn't perhaps another tradeoff instead of a dorm. He'd rather plan for what we can afford rather than what we want. He thought a financial framework was needed for the discussion.

David Frommer said that based on current inflationary increases, there is concern the agency won't be able to build everything based on the fixed budget, but it is difficult to predict how much inflation can be absorbed. He suggested that only certain portions of the facility make sense to bid as alternates from a price-point line. Henry Tom noted that instructor housing was not part of the original nomination but was added during initial programming.

Peg Rees said an important issue is the number of employees – well trained and on site for any given situation – and retaining those employees. It is critical to have people who know the property like the back of their hand. Residential schools have residential instructors. You want a bonding between students and instructional staff. What message does it send to have the instructors leave at night? Loretta Asay agreed and pointed to operator liability, as well, for not having staff on site. Safety and liability are key issues. Another issue is affordable housing for low-paid staff. Alan O'Neill agreed with Peg and thought it acceptable to build one of the dorms later. Christine Bendel said just one minor mishap could derail the entire concept.

There was concurrence among the core group to favor building 2 dorms and some modest instructor housing.

Pat Fleming reminded the group that BLM will undertake a formal value analysis at the end of design development. This will determine where the budget stands, will look at functional aspects,

and determine recommendations for coming within budget. He is still open to ideas for who should best participate in that study. Peg Rees asked if the agency has a general contractor in those discussions to review constructability as well as materials. Pat agreed it might be good to include such a person for this project.

4. Cost Update

Michael Reiland provided a brief update on the impact of inflationary cost increases on the project. Some contingencies have been built into the budget already, but inflation is outpacing what was originally predicted. That's why the agency is looking at base bid versus alternates.

5. Schedule Update

Michael Reiland provided an update on the overall project timeline. Peg Rees asked Michael to walk the group through the project schedule. Solid black lines within shaded blue lines indicate items that have been completed. Peg asked how the schedule shows when items are delayed. There is no use of another color to track that. Michael replied that he updates the schedule every month. When an item is delayed, everything on the chart pushes back. The software does not record changes over time.

Cultural Treatment Plan – the agency hopes implementation of the treatment plan will start around October 1.

Geotechnical Studies – Line and Space will coordinate with the treatment plan to determine where drilling can take place for footings, etc. A major issue is to study the soil. The studies need to happen as quickly as possible.

Fire Control – Line and Space is meeting with Clark County tomorrow (September 21), since fire control of structures falls under their jurisdiction. Nancy Flagg asked about the costs for Clark County fire control. Michael said the meeting would determine what will be needed. Peg Rees clarified that the school district follows county fire codes and there are no school-specific codes to address.

Water Line – Michael said discussions are continuing to secure special account reserve (SAR) funding for the municipal water line.

NDOT Coordination – Line and Space will coordinate the Route 159 entrance with the Nevada Department of Transportation and determine the timeline and costs. Peg Rees asked if the project has funding to cover these costs and the answer was yes.

Operator – The statements of work for both facilities are at the state office for review. The plan remains to go out around November 1 with a Request for Information (RFI) for a 30-day response. That will be followed by the request for competitive bids, ideally out for 90 days with a 30-day selection process.

NEPA – The contractor, Otak, still predicts the EA will continue into the spring but is looking at ways to squeeze it some to accommodate the overall schedule. The first preliminary draft of the EA has been received, and the cultural treatment plan is scheduled to begin October 1. Peg Rees suggested there needed to be a critical pathway between NEPA and construction documents on the project schedule.

Blaine Benedict asked if the resource management plan had been executed. Michael said it had not been but was anticipated soon.

6. Standing Reports

A. *Line and Space Architects*

Henry Tom and Les Wallach of Line and Space Architects provided an update on recent activities (*on file in UNLV Public Lands Institute office and BLM office*). Many of the design development issues were covered earlier in the meeting. The firm has meetings scheduled with Dale Etheridge on the observatory, with Paul Buck and Jeanne Klockow on the curriculum and instructional venues, with the Clark County Fire Department, and with the Clark County School District on the kitchen design and dormitories. The design development timeline is still on track for December 2005. Value analysis may be delayed to January 2006 to accommodate participants' schedules. Michael Reiland noted there may be good reasons to hold off until January to accommodate critical pathways, including water, NEPA, and the operator selection. Pat Fleming said the second week of January seemed acceptable for the value analysis, but Henry Tom pointed out that Les Wallach will be unavailable during that period.

B. *BLM Capital Improvements*

Michael Reiland provided an update on BLM capital improvements at Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area. The environmental assessment for the visitor center has just started, and Otak is conducting surveys now. The agency expects some preliminary data next week to allow some emergency repairs to be made at the visitor center. The renovated Red Springs area is almost ready to be opened.

C. *Community Outreach*

Nancy Flagg provided an update on community outreach activities. Angie Lara made a presentation to the Clark County School District Board of Trustees on September 8. The presentation was very well received, with several trustees testifying to their own childhood experience at science camps and the impact it had upon their lives. Interim Superintendent Orci indicated to the board that he would work with the agency on a transportation plan and bring it back for their review in the future. The board invited BLM to make periodic updates to them on the center's progress, and they asked for site tours to be arranged. Loretta said the trustees' staff has since clarified that the next update should occur in February 2006 at approximately 6-month intervals. The update could be a packet of information rather than a formal presentation. She is working with district staff to set up a site tour for the first week of November. The next step will be to present a resolution for the trustees' approval, which Michael, Loretta and UNLV are working on.

Nancy informed the group that Jeanne Klockow, Billie Young, and Laurie Howard staffed booths at the Clark County Farm Festival in September. Information about the RRDLC was provided to teachers to get them excited about the curriculum and opportunities for their students. Interactive activities and giveaways were provided to both students and teachers. Billie Young added that the Red Rock Canyon Interpretive Association and the Friends of Red Rock Canyon provided materials for the teachers' packets.

Nancy said an informational newsletter about the RRDLC project is in progress. It will be used as a general handout at events and presentations. The university is awaiting approvals from BLM. Loretta Asay said she was looking at an outreach activity with Clark County teachers on October 15 and would like to have the handout available by then. She and Michael have discussed holding an open house in this same time period so that Les Wallach could do both on one trip. Nancy pointed to the need for the university to be involved in outreach efforts, as that is part of their task agreement with BLM. If an open house is delayed, Loretta will find a way to pay for Les's travel for her event.

7. Committee Reports

A. Building Committee

Minutes of the August committee meeting were provided to the core group (*on file with BLM and UNLV Public Lands Institute*). As noted earlier in the meeting, the committee spent August 16-17 conducting an in-depth review of the design development drawings.

B. Wild Horse and Burro Committee

Chair Billie Young reported that the committee has developed a working group to determine needs between the Red Rock Canyon Visitor Center and the wild horse and burro facility.

There were no other committee reports.

The meeting adjourned at 12:30 p.m.